



GOALS

As students experience Philippians 1, they will. . .

- find out about Paul's life situation when he wrote Philippians.
- learn how to pray more powerfully for each other.
- get a handle on how God can help them stop the "commit-fail cycle."

MATERIALS: Group

- Colored pencils (at least two colors per student)
- Whiteboard and markers
- To make it fun, you may want to reward the students who correctly answer the "Bonus" review question (see below). If so, you'll want to pick up an inexpensive gift such as candy or a \$5 gift card from iTunes.

MATERIALS: Each Student

- A Bible
- A pen
- Student Pages
- Scripture sheets for Philippians 1

SESSION INTRO

Prayer

After your students have gathered, pray for your group in the same way Epaphras prayed for his friends in Colossians 4:12—that they "may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured."

Review

Help your students stay connected to the big themes of this study by asking the following questions:

Who wrote Philippians? What kind of book is it?

Who did God use (besides Paul) to start the church in Philippi?

Bonus Question: What was Lydia's occupation? (You may want to give a prize to the student who can come up with the answer to this one!)

DIGGING IN

Remind your students that since Philippians is a letter from Paul (with help from Timothy) to Christians in Philippi, studying Philippians is a lot like reading someone else's mail. One of the best ways to understand the letter is to find out as much as possible about both the writer and the people he wrote it to.

Have your students read Philippians 1 using their Scripture sheets. As they read, they should use a colored pencil to mark every mention of the writer, Paul. They should look for words like "I," "me," and "my"—in addition to the name "Paul."

When most of your students have finished, ask the group to tell you what they found out about Paul. As they share, record the information on the board. The board will begin to look like this (but don't worry if it's not as detailed).

Paul:

- He thanks God every time he remembers the Philippians (v. 3).
- He prays with joy for them because of their partnership with the gospel (v. 4).
- He has them in his heart (v. 7).
- He longs for them with the affection of Christ Jesus (v. 8).
- He's praying that their love may abound more and more (v. 9).
- The things that happened to him have helped advance the gospel (v. 12).

- He's in chains for Christ (v. 13).
- What has happened to him will turn out for his deliverance (v. 19).
- He wants Christ to be exalted in his body (v. 20).
- He's torn between wanting to live and being ready to die (v. 23).

Ask for a volunteer to come to the board and circle any of the items that describe Paul's life situation. Then discuss Paul's situation as a group. Bring the discussion to a close by condensing Paul's circumstances into a few short sentences. Have your students note these on their journal pages. For example:

Paul's Life Situation:

- It's been a rough road.
- He's in prison (chains).
- He's thinking about death—he must be old.
- But he seems happy, contented.
- Even in these circumstances, he's still thinking about what he can do for the Lord.

Now, ask for another volunteer to come to the board and draw a box around anything that describes the nature of Paul's relationship with the Philippians.

Then ask:

What type of relationship did Paul have with the Philippians?

- It appears to have been a very close, "soul-mate" type of relationship.
- Paul is grateful for them and interested in their spiritual growth.

At one point Paul wrote that he was praying for the Philippians. What was he praying for?

- That their love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.

Why was Paul praying for that?

Some students may venture a guess on that last question, but be sure to explain that we don't have to guess why Paul was praying this—he told them why. Tell your group about terms of conclusion such as "therefore," "so that," and "that." Then ask them to look for a concluding phrase in Philippians 1:9–11. Once they've found this, they should be able to tell you why Paul is praying that the Philippians' love will abound. Record these reasons on the board, and have your students write them on their journal pages in the spaces provided.

Why Paul Is Praying:

1. That they can discern what is best.
2. That they may be pure and blameless.
3. That they may be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Christ.

TAKING IT INWARD

When we see a prayer like this recorded in God's Word, we should always take note; it's guaranteed to be a prayer that's pleasing to God. Ask your group members to think for a minute about these three elements of Paul's prayer, and then choose one of the elements that they need help with right now. After a couple of minutes, ask volunteers to share what they chose and why.

(NOTE: You may need to explain what *righteousness* means in the context of Philippians 1:11. A simplified definition of *righteousness* is "a right relationship with God." Another definition is "freedom from guilt or sin.")

As each student shares, have the group members write that student's name beside the item he or she needs prayer for. This week, their assignment is to pray for one another as Paul prayed for his friends. You may want to take time here to allow your students to pray for each other—or leave time for this at the close of the session.

DIGGING DEEPER

It's time to go a level deeper in Philippians 1. Have your students reread Philippians 1:1–8, using their Scripture sheets. This time, they should use a colored pencil to mark every mention of God. (Ask your group what they think a good symbol might be for marking “God”—or suggest something simple like a cloud.) Remind them to watch for pronouns like “He.”

When most have finished, ask the group to tell you what they learned about God. As they give you the facts of the passage, record these on the board. Your board will begin to look something like this:

God:

- Gives grace and peace (v. 2).
- Is our Father (v. 2).
- Should be thanked (v. 3).
- Began a good work in the Philippians (v. 6).
- Will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ (v. 6).
- Can testify how much Paul longs for the Philippians (v. 8).

Which of these tell us something about what God is doing in the lives of the Philippians?

- God began a good work in them

AND

- God is carrying it on to completion until the day of Christ (the day when Christ returns)!

Draw your students' attention to this truth by asking the following questions:

Who is the subject of this verse (the one doing the action)?

- God

Who is being acted upon?

- the Philippians (and us—Christians reading this passage today)

What is God doing?

- beginning and finishing His work in the Philippians (and us)

What do you think that “work” might be?

- saving us, teaching us, making us more like Jesus, helping us “grow up” from baby Christians to solid, mature Christians!

What is our job in this process?

- just let God do it!

TAKING IT INWARD

Talk with your students about the fact that Christians often reverse this process. We make ourselves the subject of our relationship with God! We set up all kinds of rules and tasks to do in order to grow as Christians. We try to do the “inside work” ourselves.

If applicable, you may want to share a few examples from your own life. Perhaps there was a time when you got too busy “working for God”—rather than giving God time to “do His work” in you. Perhaps there was a temptation you struggled to overcome. Every day, you recommitted not to do this thing again— and then tried in your own power not to do it. Every time, you failed. Philippians 1:6 teaches that God, who began a good work in us, will complete the work if we will only let Him. Our job is to draw near to Him—to tap into His strength, His power, and His ability to do in us what we cannot do in and of ourselves.

This principle may be tough for students to grasp, but your personal illustrations will help. They may also have examples to share.

Allow your group to further experience this concept from Philippians 1:6 by spending some time listening to God. Invite them to move to a place of solitude (perhaps to the corners of the room, a hallway nearby, or a quiet spot outside), and read the passages on their journal pages (also listed here) using their Bibles.

As they read, they should note on their journal pages anything they learn about the work God wants to do in them. When they've finished, they should do the exercise entitled "My Part of the Process."

Philippians 2:12–13

Titus 3:4–7

Hebrews 13:20–21

Ephesians 2:4–10

After a few minutes, call your group together to share what they uncovered in Scripture. Here are some questions to use as discussion starters:

How is God active in *initiating* our relationship with Him?

How did you (personally) allow God to begin His work in you?

How is God active in *continuing* our relationship with Him?

What do you have going on in your life right now that's evidence of the fact that God is working in you?

Look at Hebrews 13:20–21 again. How does this promise affect your search for God's will in your life?

This is huge! Help your group understand that if we allow Him to, God will work His will IN us. He will equip us and work in us the things that are pleasing to Him. It's almost like the teacher taking the test for us. We shouldn't pray "God, what is your will?" but rather, "God, work your will in me."

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE

Help your group members apply the truth of this session by giving them a couple of minutes to do the "Putting Into Practice" exercise on their journal pages (also printed below). Suggest that your students tear off this portion of the journal page and keep it in a prominent place this week—use it as a bookmark, tape it to a bathroom mirror or the inside of a locker. Or take a picture of it and create a phone or computer wallpaper.

What adjustments can I make to allow God to complete His work in me? To allow God to work in me, I will . . .

- 1.**
- 2.**
- 3.**

Begin wrapping up by asking students to pray—aloud or silently—about the fact that God wants to begin and complete His work in them. Encourage them to make any changes they need to make in order to listen to God and allow Him to work in their lives. Also, remind them to pray the Philippians 1:9–11 prayer for one another this week!

Close your session by asking students to boil their thoughts from this session down to a single fact about following Jesus. Have them write this short statement under the heading "What I Learned about Following Christ" on their journal pages.